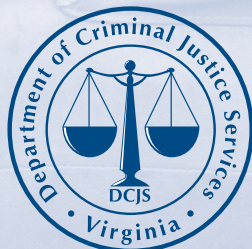# School Safety Training Needs Assessment: Report on Findings

Department of Criminal Justice Services
Criminal Justice Research Center, Evaluation Unit

School Safety
Training Needs Assessment:
Report on Findings

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The mission of the Criminal Justice Research Center is to provide accurate and comprehensive data and research to guide strategic, policy and budgetary decision-making on criminal justice issues, policies and programs. The Center is responsible for the coordination, collection, statistical analysis and interpretation of system-wide data on crime and criminals in Virginia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Virginia Code §9.1-184 establishes the Virginia Center for School Safety (VCSS) and specifies its duties. According to this legislation, one of the mandated responsibilities of the VCSS is to:

"Provide training for Virginia public school personnel in school safety..."

To identify safety training that school staff believe would be most helpful to them, the Evaluation Unit of the Department of Criminal Justice Services conducted a survey of staff at selected public schools in Virginia. The survey also assessed staff awareness of school policies and procedures on school safety, specified methods of training most likely to be accessed by school personnel, and identified printed resource materials and other issues that school staff would most like the VCSS to address. Administrators, full-time teachers, and counselors from secondary, middle, and alternative schools representing each of the eight school regions in Virginia completed a total of 1,758 surveys. Most respondents were female teachers, and over one-half of the respondents had worked in Virginia's public school system for over ten years.

To guide the VCSS in providing technical assistance and resources, the survey asked about safety-related school policies. At least three-quarters of respondents reported that policies existed to cover access to schools, crisis management, lockdown/evacuation procedures, removing disruptive students, diffusing disruptive and assaultive students, and search and seizure. In general, less than half of respondents said that existing safety policies were completely comprehensive. One-third or more did not know if their schools had policies covering drug testing of students, the school safety audit, loss prevention/ inventory control, and vandalism/graffiti control. Almost half of respondents said that their schools did not have policies related to security equipment.

Because one of the functions of the VCSS is to offer training, the survey also asked respondents to rate how helpful specific training topics would be to them. Staff reported that training in all specific safety topics would be helpful, with training to improve their own personal safety rated as the most helpful general category. Respondents rated the following specific training topics as most helpful:

- identifying students in need of special services or assistance,
- methods for diffusing disruptive and assaultive students,
- identifying students at-risk for violent behavior,
- identifying and avoiding at-risk situations, and
- intervening with angry/abusive families.

Most staff reported that they preferred to attend training on their school campuses rather than off-campus; almost half said they would use training videos; and almost one-third reported that they would use printed information and access the Internet for training. Respondents specified most often that printed resources on the legal rights and liabilities of teachers would be helpful. They also most frequently asked the VCSS to clarify the roles, responsibilities, and staffing needs of School Resource Officers (SROs). In addition, when asked about School Resource Officers and School Security Officers, respondents generally reported that these officers had positive impacts on school safety.

Based on the findings outlined in this report, the DCJS Evaluation Unit suggests that the following recommendations be considered.

1. In addition to student safety, the VCSS should also consider providing training to address staff safety issues.

2. The VCSS should consider providing training to school staff on their school campuses. Additional training formats could include videos, printed resources, and the VCSS Internet website.

3. The VCSS should consider reviewing existing school policies, identifying "best practice" policies, and providing training on these safety policies to school personnel, particularly newly-hired staff.

4. The VCSS should consider developing and providing training and/or resources to improve communication among school staff regarding school safety.

5. The VCSS should consider developing and providing training to clarify the roles and responsibilities of School Resource Officers (SROs) and School Security Officers.

STUDY RATIONALE

The Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), Virginia Center for School Safety (VCSS) met with the DCJS Evaluation Unit to request an assessment of the training needs of staff in Virginia's public schools. The intent of the assessment was to provide information to guide training strategies and resource development by the VCSS. This report is submitted to the VCSS in response to its request.

INTRODUCTION

With the passage of HB 391(§9-173.21) in April 2000, the Virginia General Assembly established the Virginia Center for School Safety (VCSS) within the Department of Criminal Justice Services. Effective October 2001, this legislation was replaced with §9.1-184 (see Appendix A). The VCSS is staffed by a director and a youth safety specialist, with a mission to provide resources, training, data collection, and information on effective school safety initiatives to localities.

Legislation directs the VCSS to "...provide training for Virginia public school personnel in school safety; ...serve as a resource and referral center for Virginia school divisions; and ... provide technical assistance to Virginia school divisions." To help guide the use of limited available resources, the VCSS met with the Evaluation Unit to discuss how best to collect information from those people most directly involved with issues of school safety. A survey was constructed and distributed to the school administrators, teachers and counselors who would be the primary target of initial trainings provided by the VCSS.

This survey assessed the topics of training that school staff believed would be most helpful to them. In addition, the questions assessed staff awareness of school policies and personnel that impact school safety, specified methods of training most likely to be accessed by school personnel, and identified printed resource materials and other issues that school staff would most like the VCSS to address. An accurate assessment of training needs for school personnel is an important step towards guiding the types and quality of services provided by the VCSS.

METHODOLOGY

Guided by discussions between the VCSS and the Evaluation Unit, a written survey instrument and sampling methodology were developed. The survey was pre-tested at one secondary and one middle school, and was revised accordingly. Virginia is geographically divided into eight school regions and at least one locality in each school region was included in the sample. As Figure 1 illustrates, sample schools are located in various geographical areas of Virginia. In addition, sample localities represent the statewide composition of small, medium, and large populations as well as the ethnic characteristics within their school regions. Survey respondents included full-time administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors in secondary, middle, and alternative schools in each sample locality.

To solicit cooperation and participation in the assessment, the survey instrument was faxed to each locality's superintendent with an explanatory letter. Superintendents then specified the number of surveys to be distributed at each school. Principals were responsible for distributing surveys to appropriate staff members (see Appendix B for a list of participating schools and principals). Respondents remained anonymous by sealing their completed surveys in envelopes, which were then returned to the Evaluation Unit for processing (see Appendix C for survey instrument).

FIGURE 1

VCSS Training Needs Assessment

Sample Localities

SCHOOL REGION	LOCALITY	POPULATION SIZE
1	Goochland Co.	12,001 to 25,000
2	Newport News City	100,001 or more
3	Mathews Co.	up to 12,000
3	Westmoreland Co.	12,001 to 25,000
4	Manassas City	25,001 to 100,000
5	Rockingham Co.	25,001 to 100,000
6	Montgomery Co.	25,001 to 100,000
6	Salem City	12,001 to 25,000
7	Wise Co.	25,001 to 100,000
8	Amelia Co.	up to 12,000
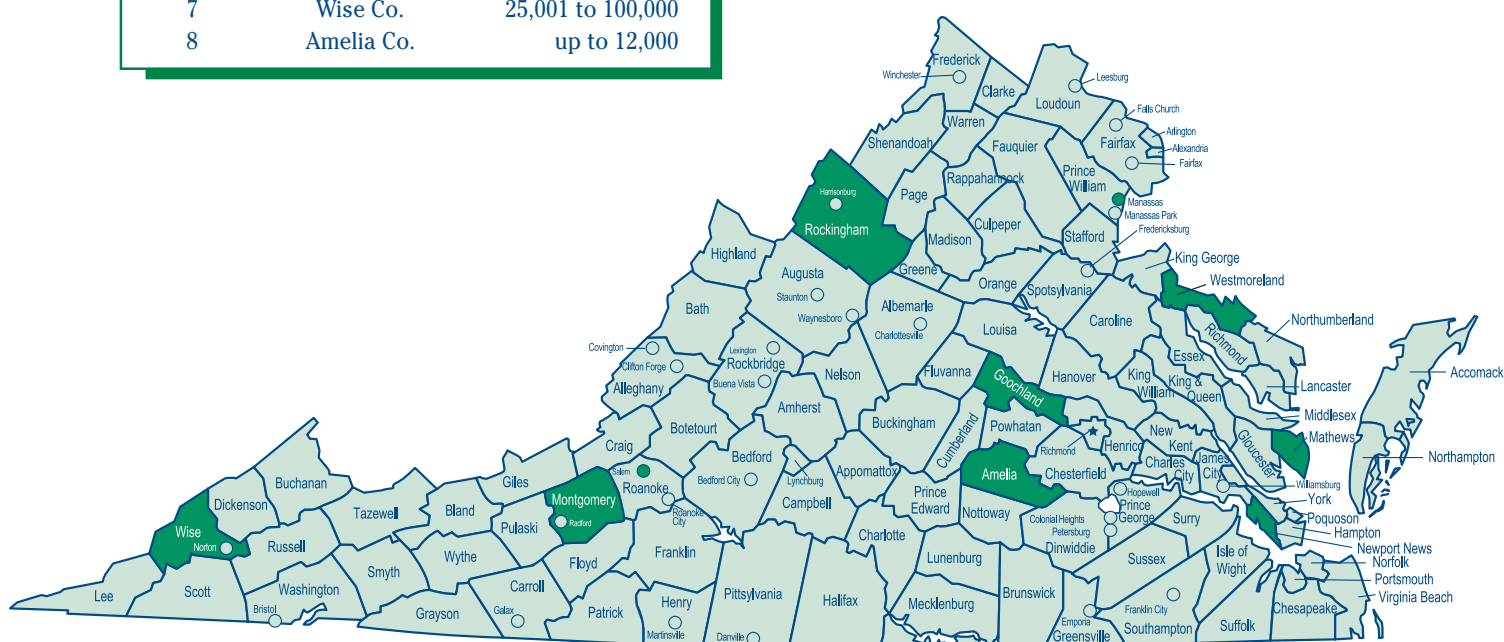
FINDINGS

Characteristics of Respondents

Responses were summarized across all survey participants as well as by respondent type (administrator, teacher, and guidance counselor). A review of data by locality revealed no notable differences; therefore, findings are aggregated across localities for this report.

One-half of the total 3,539 surveys sent to schools were completed and returned to the Evaluation Unit by December 2000, for a total of 1,758 completed surveys. Surveys were returned from at least one school at each level (secondary, middle, and alternative) from each sample locality, with almost 60% of the completed surveys representing secondary schools. As shown in Figure 2, alternative schools returned 68% of the surveys that were sent to them, secondary schools returned 55%, and middle schools returned 42%.

FIGURE 2

NUMBER OF SURVEYS SENT AND RETURNED, BY LEVEL OF SCHOOL
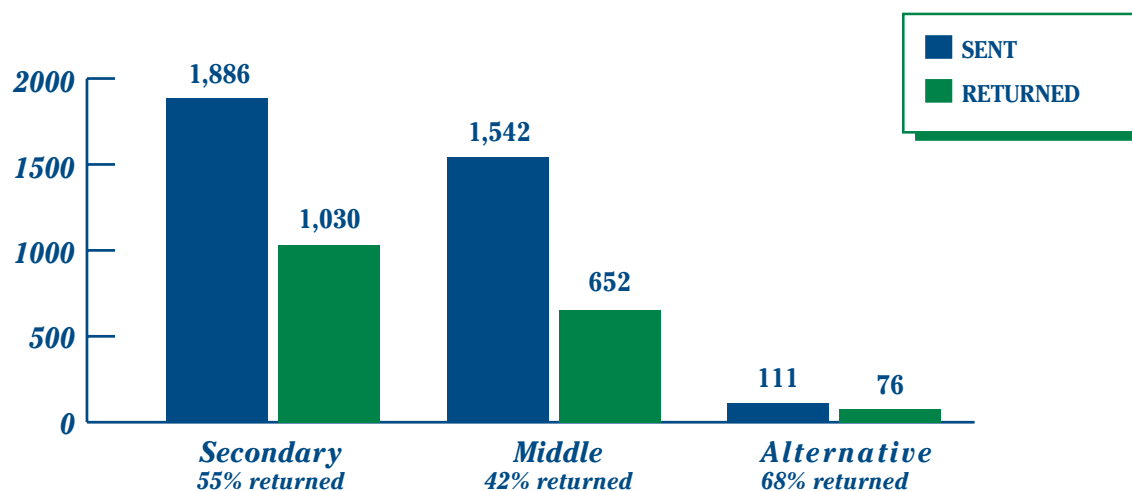
When grouped by population size, sample localities returned comparable percentages of the surveys they received, with the largest population locality returning surveys at a slightly lower proportion (see Table 1).

Table 1: Surveys Returned by Population Group of Sample Localities

Population size	# of surveys sent	# of surveys returned	Rate of survey return
Up to 12,000	165	99	60%
12,001 to 25,000	354	208	59%
25,001 to 100,000	1,706	938	55%
100,001 or more	1,314	513	39%
TOTAL	**3,539**	**1,758**	**50%**

Ninety-one percent of the surveys were completed by teachers, including 12% who identified themselves as special education teachers. Six percent of the surveys returned were completed by administrators, with the remaining 4% of respondents identifying themselves as guidance counselors. By gender, 68% of respondents were females and 32% were males.

More than half of all respondents (55%) had been employed in Virginia's public school system for over ten years. Sixteen percent of total respondents said they had worked less than two years, 14% between two and five years, and 15% between five and ten years. By type of position, however, Figure 3 shows that administrators and guidance counselors more frequently reported being employed over ten years, compared with teachers.

FIGURE 3

RESPONDENTS' LENGTH OF TIME EMPLOYED IN VIRGINIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, BY TYPE OF POSITION
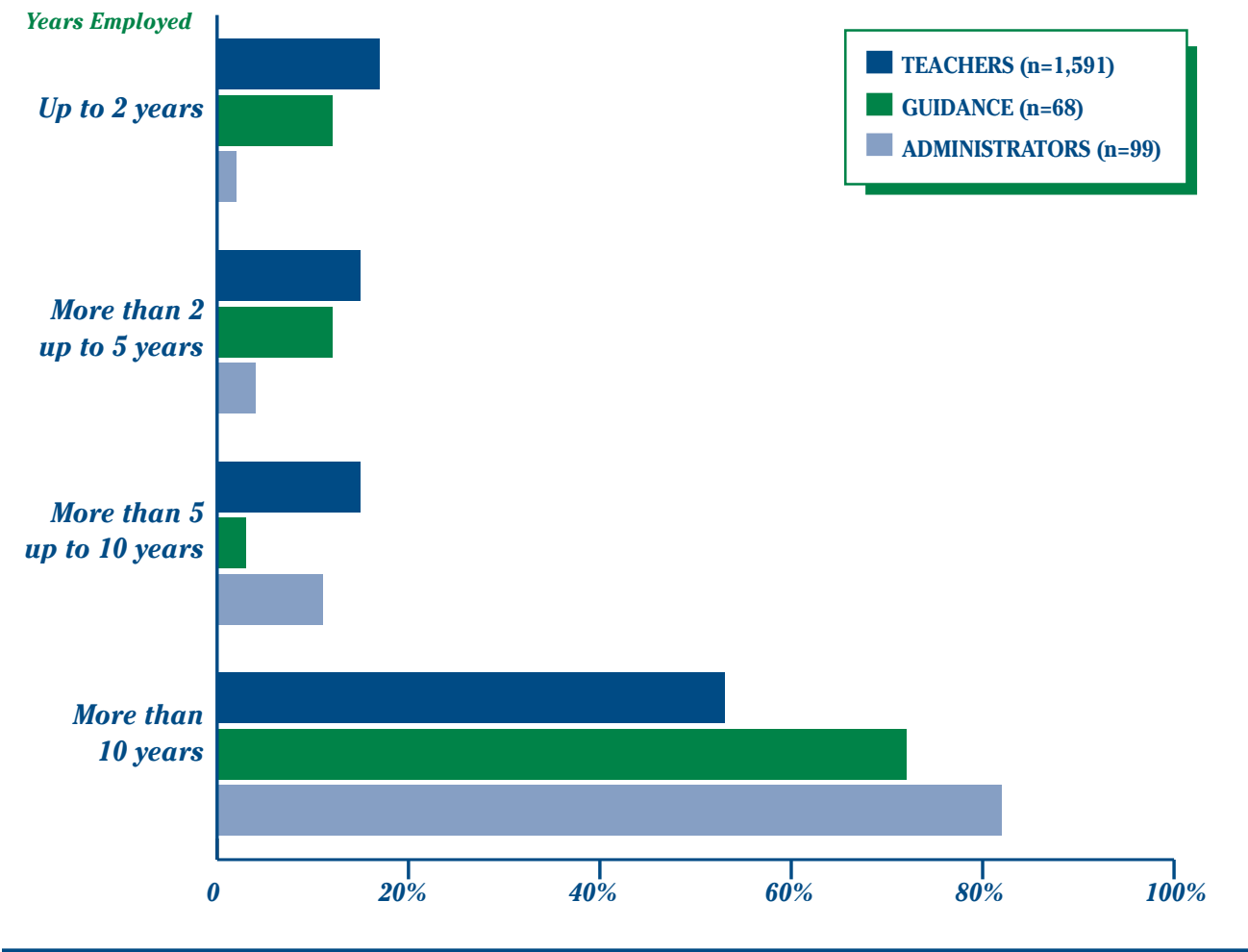
School Safety Policies

The first section of the survey asked respondents to indicate if their schools had policies to address a list of safety-related topics, such as a crisis management plan or drug testing of students. The purpose of this question was to assess the perceptions and awareness of respondents, not to verify the actual existence of safety policies. The percentages of respondents who said their school had an existing safety policy ranged from 24% for drug testing of students to 90% for controlling access to schools (see Table 2). More than three-quarters of the respondents reported that their schools had policies to address:

- access control,
- crisis management,
- lockdown/evacuation,
- removing disruptive students,
- diffusing disruptive and assaultive students, and
- search and seizure.

Almost half of the respondents reported their schools did not have policies on security equipment. In addition, approximately one-third or more of the respondents said they did not know if policies existed to cover drug testing of students, the school safety audit, loss prevention/inventory control, and vandalism/graffiti control.

Table 2: Perceptions of Whether School Safety Policies Exist

Topic	% Yes	% No	% Don't know	% Missing
Access control	90%	3%	5%	1%
Crisis management plan	87%	1%	11%	1%
Lockdown/evacuation	86%	2%	10%	2%
Removing disruptive students	86%	5%	7%	2%
Diffusing disruptive and assaultive students	79%	4%	16%	1%
Search and seizure	78%	1%	19%	2%
Computer/database security	61%	7%	29%	2%
Re-integrating disruptive students back to class	59%	17%	22%	2%
School safety audit	56%	2%	39%	3%
Vandalism/graffiti control	55%	11%	32%	3%
Loss prevention/inventory control	51%	9%	37%	3%
Security equipment	38%	48%	12%	2%
Drug testing of students	24%	28%	45%	3%

Note: In Manassas, teachers and counselors did not answer questions about school policies; therefore, the total number of respondents was 1,589 for policy questions.

Teachers and guidance counselors were more likely than administrators to say they did not know if policies existed (see Figure 4). For example, almost one-half of responding teachers said they did not know if their schools had policies covering drug testing of students, compared to 4% of responding administrators. In addition, staff employed less than two years more often said that they did not know if a policy existed compared with staff employed more than ten years. These findings may indicate that teachers and new staff would benefit from training of existing safety-related policies.

FIGURE 4

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO DID NOT KNOW IF POLICIES EXISTED, BY TYPE OF POSITION

Legend:
- TEACHERS (n=1,591)
- GUIDANCE (n=68)
- ADMINISTRATORS (n=99)

Categories (top to bottom):
Access control; Removing disruptive students; Lockdown/evacuation; Crisis management plan; Security equipment; Diffusing disruptive & assaultive students; Search and seizure; Re-integrating disruptive students back to class; Computer/database security; Vandalism/graffiti control; Loss prevention/inventory control; School safety audit; Drug testing of students

X-axis: 0, 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%

Respondents who said that policies did exist also indicated how thoroughly they believed the policies addressed the safety issues, with ratings of "completely comprehensive," "somewhat comprehensive," or "not at all comprehensive." Although only a few of these respondents reported that existing safety policies were not at all comprehensive, no more than 57% reported that any of the specific policies listed on the survey were completely comprehensive (see Table 3). When comparing average ratings (ranging from "1" for completely comprehensive to "3" for not at all comprehensive), respondents reported that policies related to access control, removing and reintegrating disruptive students, loss prevention/inventory control, and diffusing disruptive and assaultive students were less comprehensive compared to other safety-related policies.

Table 3: Perceptions of How Thoroughly Policies Address Safety Issues

Topic	# "Yes" have existing policy	Avg. rating of how thorough	% Completely comprehensive (scale=1)	% Somewhat comprehensive (scale=2)	% Not at all comprehensive (scale=3)	% Don't know/ missing
School safety audit	895	1.31	56%	25%	<1%	19%
Crisis management plan	1,381	1.36	55%	29%	1%	16%
Lockdown/evacuation	1,374	1.36	57%	29%	2%	13%
Search and seizure	1,234	1.40	48%	30%	1%	22%
Computer/database security	974	1.48	46%	37%	2%	15%
Vandalism/graffiti control	876	1.53	42%	40%	3%	15%
Drug testing of students	381	1.55	37%	35%	3%	25%
Security equipment	604	1.55	41%	41%	2%	15%
Diffusing disruptive and assaultive students	1,251	1.56	40%	42%	2%	15%
Loss prevention/inventory control	814	1.58	38%	47%	2%	13%
Removing disruptive students	1,359	1.59	41%	43%	5%	11%
Re-integrating disruptive students back to class	939	1.60	40%	43%	4%	13%
Access control	1,434	1.63	37%	50%	3%	10%

Note: In Manassas, only administrators answered questions about school policies.

The survey also asked respondents to identify any school safety issues that were not covered by existing policies or procedures. Sixty-four staff members responded to this question. Some comments emphasized the need to improve and/or consistently enforce existing policies; other comments highlighted the need for improved communication and support between administration and teachers. The most frequent suggestions for *new* policies included making improvements to classrooms for teacher safety (such as installing emergency buzzers, phones, or other notification equipment). Long-term school staff accounted for almost 60% of the respondents to this question and most frequently noted the need for improved teacher safety as well as improved access control to schools.
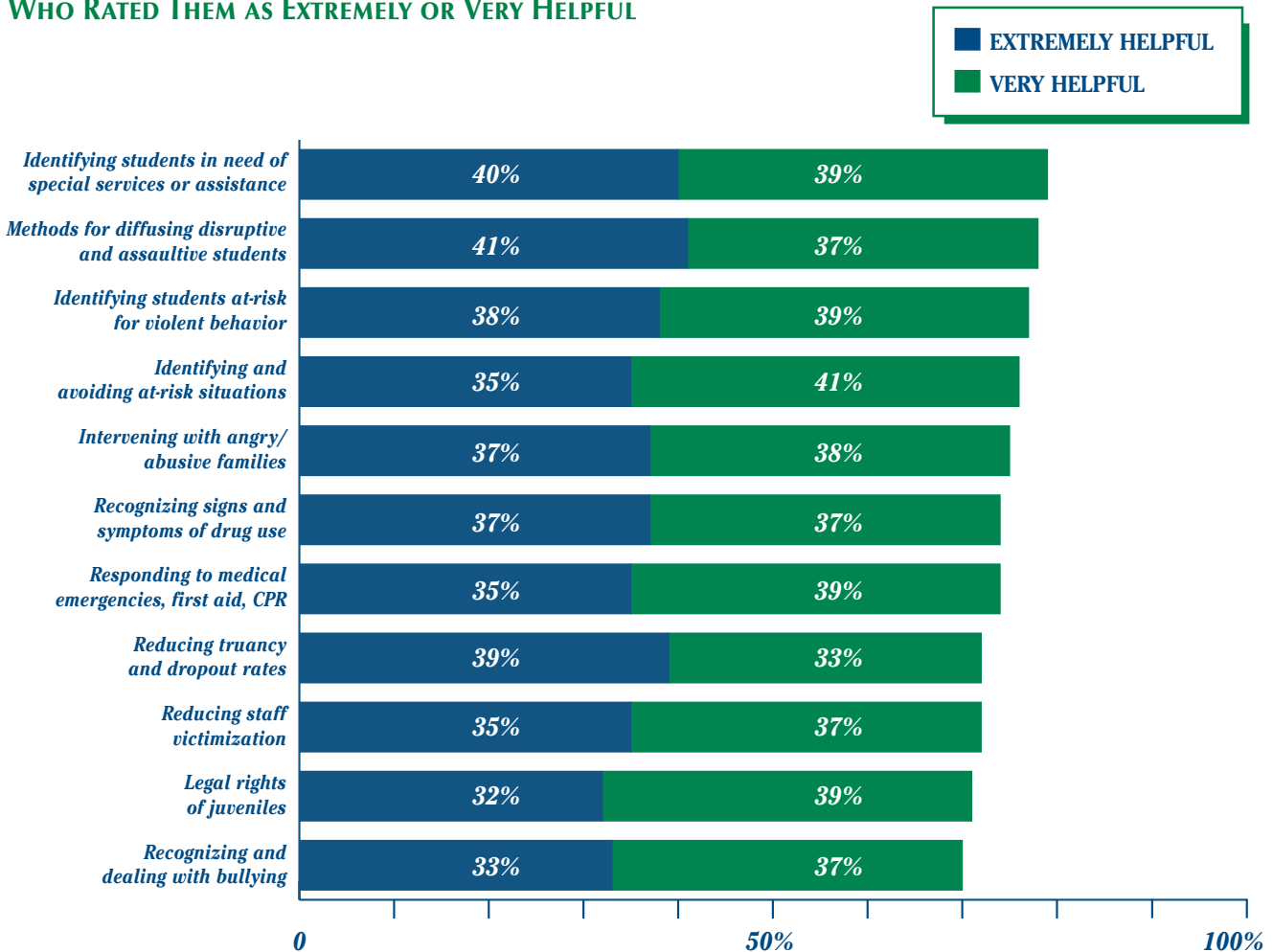
School Safety Training Needs by Topic

According to the mission of the VCSS, one of its primary functions is to offer safety-related training. To address this responsibility, the research team reviewed school safety literature and compiled a list of possible training topics to present on the survey, including issues such as identifying weapons and drugs, dealing with bullying, school crime and violence data collection, search and seizure law, reducing staff victimization, and responding to critical incidents. Respondents were asked to rate how helpful it would be for them to receive training on each individual topic. The degree of helpfulness ranged from "extremely helpful" (value of 1) to "not at all helpful" (value of 5). Appendix D contains a complete table of responses by individual safety topic.

Researchers then evaluated how respondents prioritized the helpfulness of topics in two ways. First, those topics rated "extremely helpful" or "very helpful" by most respondents were considered as high priorities. At least 70% of the respondents reported that training would be "extremely" or "very" helpful for each individual topic shown in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5

HIGHEST PRIORITY TOPICS BY PERCENTAGES OF ALL RESPONDENTS WHO RATED THEM AS EXTREMELY OR VERY HELPFUL

■ EXTREMELY HELPFUL
■ VERY HELPFUL

Topic	Extremely Helpful	Very Helpful
Identifying students in need of special services or assistance	40%	39%
Methods for diffusing disruptive and assaultive students	41%	37%
Identifying students at-risk for violent behavior	38%	39%
Identifying and avoiding at-risk situations	35%	41%
Intervening with angry/abusive families	37%	38%
Recognizing signs and symptoms of drug use	37%	37%
Responding to medical emergencies, first aid, CPR	35%	39%
Reducing truancy and dropout rates	39%	33%
Reducing staff victimization	35%	37%
Legal rights of juveniles	32%	39%
Recognizing and dealing with bullying	33%	37%

0   50%   100%

On the survey, individual topics were further grouped into the six general category headings shown in Figure 6. More respondents said that training in personal safety of staff would be "extremely" or "very helpful" compared with the other general categories.

FIGURE 6

PERCENTAGES OF RESPONDENTS BY HELPFULNESS RATINGS OF GENERAL SAFETY-RELATED TRAINING CATEGORIES

Legend:
- Extremely/very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not helpful

Category	Extremely/very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not helpful
Personal Safety of Staff	75%	21%	5%
Student-Focused Topics	70%	24%	7%
Legal & Constitutional Issues	65%	27%	8%
Crime Prevention	62%	27%	12%
Critical Incident Response	60%	30%	10%
Crime Reporting	53%	33%	14%
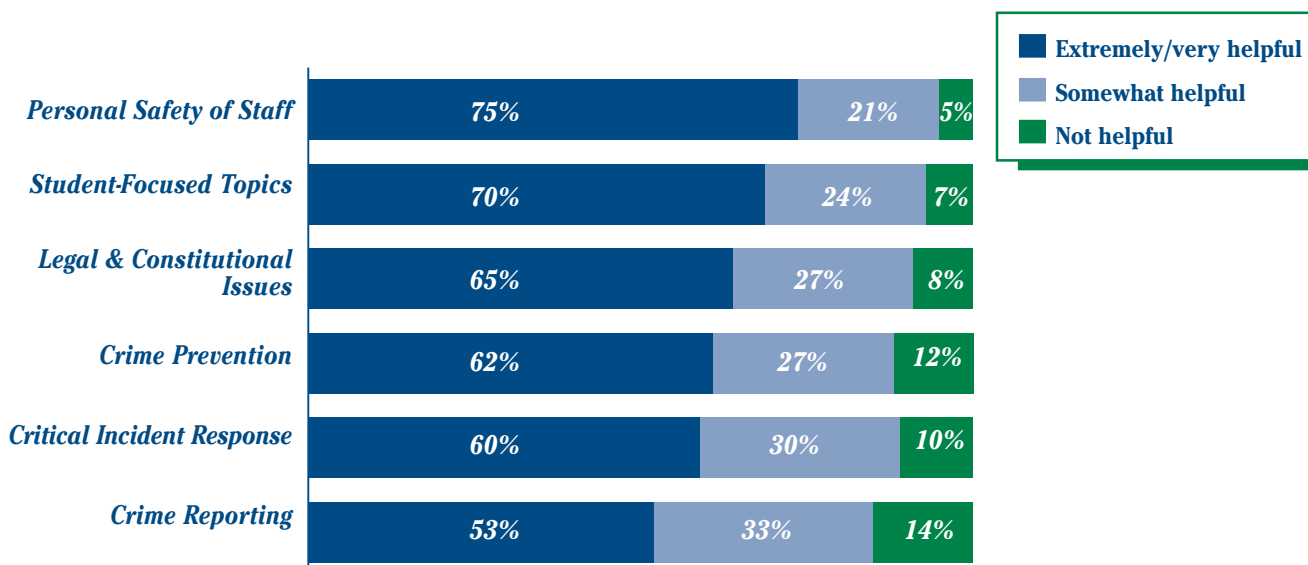
Another method used to prioritize helpfulness is to compare the average ratings by training topics. Specifically, responses of "extremely helpful" were scored with a value of "1" while responses of "not at all helpful" were scored with a value of "5." Therefore, average ratings closest to the value of "1" may be considered high priorities for respondents. Analysis of average ratings reiterated the respondents' training priorities as indicated above.

Average ratings indicate that training would be at least somewhat helpful in all individual training topics. Respondents considered that training in identifying students who are at-risk for violent behavior, methods for diffusing disruptive and assaultive students, identifying students in need of special services or assistance, and intervening with angry/abusive families would be the highest priorities (with 1.9 average ratings on a scale where 1.0 indicates "extremely helpful"). Also by average rating, respondents reported that training in the following topics would be the lowest priorities: using technology to improve school crime and violence data collection, improving safety by modifying school facility design, using technology to improve school safety and security, and clarifying the roles of community response teams (see Appendix D).

When comparing average ratings of individual training topics by position of respondent, administrators rated each training topic as more helpful when compared with teachers. In addition, guidance counselors rated some topics (law-related education, reducing truancy and dropout rates, recognizing and dealing with bullying and sexual harassment, juvenile court procedures, intervening with angry families, and responding to and providing follow-up after critical incidents) as more helpful compared with teachers. Findings did not reveal notable differences when comparing new and long-term staff.

The survey also asked respondents to suggest any *other* training topics that would be helpful to them. Eighty-two respondents (5% of total) identified additional training topics. When grouped by the six general category headings previously identified, most of the "write-in" suggestions for training related to student-focused training, followed by crime prevention, and staff safety. The most frequent suggestions of specific topics not already on the survey list of training topics included:

- the legal rights and liabilities of teachers and administrators,
- self-defense for staff, and
- cultural sensitivity/awareness.

Formats for Training

To determine how to most effectively deliver training to school staff, the survey listed seven training formats and asked respondents to indicate the three methods they would be most likely to attend or access. As shown in Figure 7, almost two-thirds of the respondents preferred trainings that take place at their schools, either with full- or half-day trainings (64% of all respondents) or as short presentations at staff meetings (61%). Almost half (48%) said they would use videos, and almost one-third indicated that they would be likely to use printed materials or a website (32% and 31%, respectively). Respondents would be least likely to attend training held away from their schools (28%) or multi-day/multi-topic training (17%). Although not indicated in Figure 7, more than half of the administrators and guidance counselors would be likely to attend trainings that take place away from their schools compared with 26% of teachers.

Twenty-nine respondents (2% of total) noted another type of training format they would be likely to use. Some stated that trainings should be held only during school hours while others said they would attend summer, evening, or Professional Development Institute workshops.

FIGURE 7

PERCENTAGE OF ALL RESPONDENTS BY PREFERRED TRAINING FORMATS*
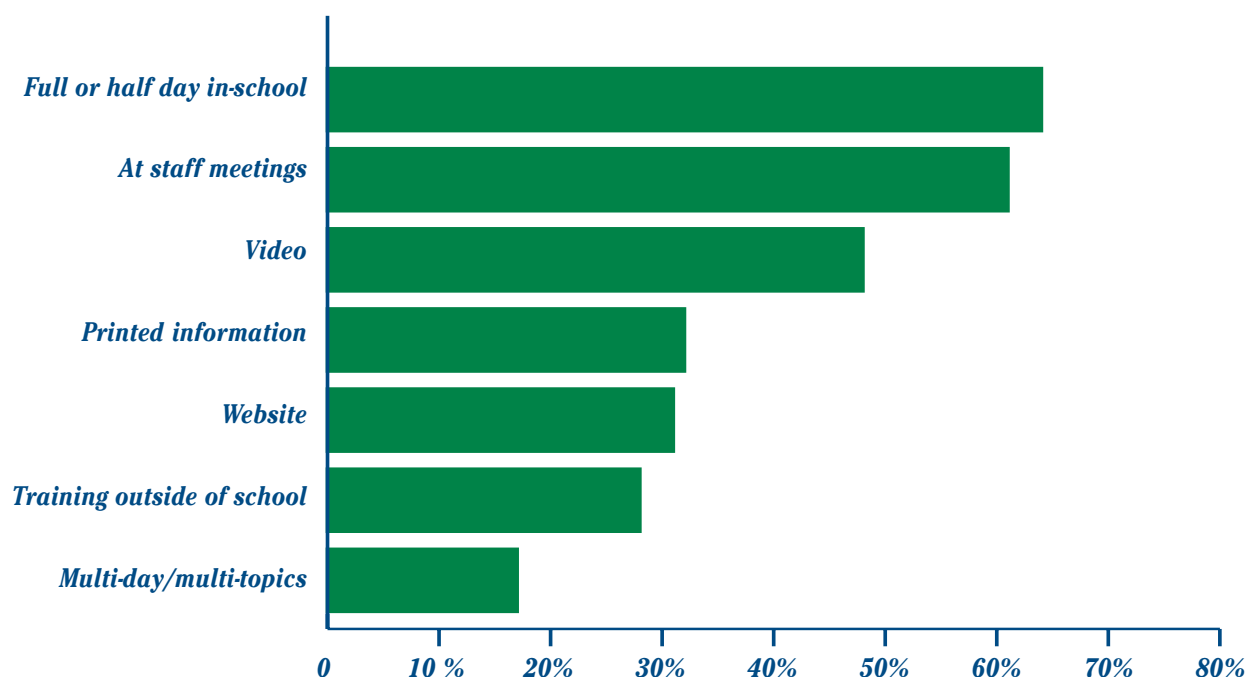
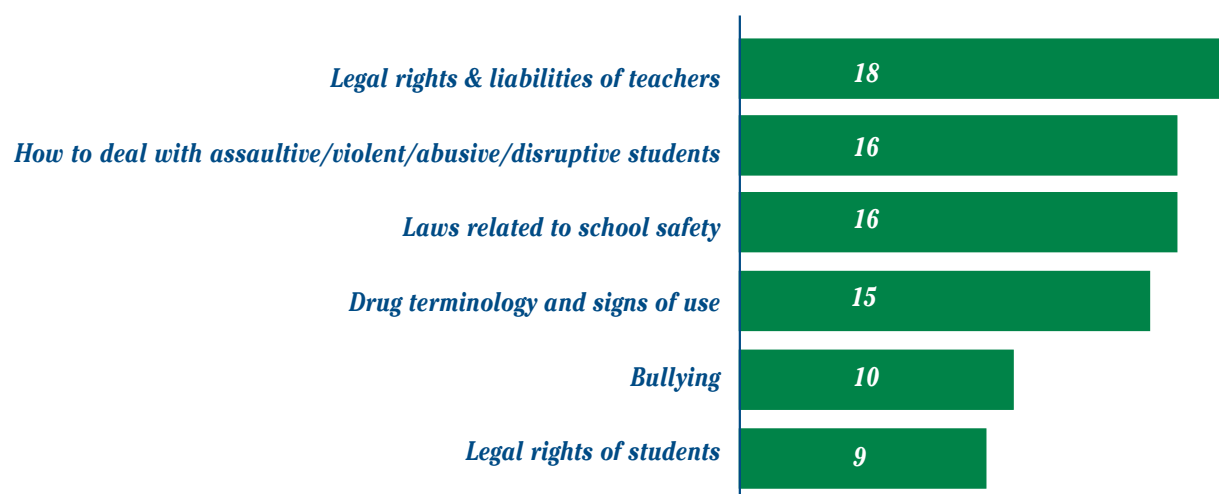** Respondents could choose up to three types of training.*

Printed Materials Requested and Other Issues

Legislation also directs the VCSS to serve as a resource and referral center for Virginia's schools. The survey asked respondents to describe specific printed resources that would be useful to them. Although the number of respondents to this question (7% of total) was small, the most common requests were for printed materials on the specific subjects as shown in Figure 8.

Some of the less frequent suggestions included printed information on the occult and witchcraft, FBI statistics, helping juveniles deal with grief and loss, and specific tornado procedures for the classroom setting.

FIGURE 8

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS BY TOPIC OF PRINTED RESOURCE REQUESTED

Topic	Number
Legal rights & liabilities of teachers	18
How to deal with assaultive/violent/abusive/disruptive students	16
Laws related to school safety	16
Drug terminology and signs of use	15
Bullying	10
Legal rights of students	9

The survey also asked respondents to indicate any other issues that they would like the VCSS to address. Six percent of the respondents identified a topic or area of concern that was not previously addressed in other parts of the survey. The most common of these responses are below.

• Roles, responsibilities, and staffing needs of School Resource Officers (SROs) should be clarified. (23 respondents)

• Support and communication between administration and staff should be improved. (14 respondents)

• There should be consistent consequences for student behaviors. (8 respondents)

A few respondents requested that the VCSS address issues related to drug-sniffing dogs on campuses; structural safety of classrooms (such as wiring, overhanging cabinets, chemicals in the classroom); and screenings to prevent the spread of disease. Two additional issues—(1) dealing with disruptive and assaultive students and (2) substance abuse—were addressed in previous sections of the survey but were also reiterated as responses to this question. In other parts of the survey, respondents rated these topics as priorities for training, requested printed materials on these issues, and said that existing policies covering these issues were less comprehensive compared with some of the other safety policies.

School Resource Officers (SROs) and School Security Officers

Finally, respondents were asked whether or not their schools had at least one full-time School Resource Officer (SRO) or full-time School Security Officer. They were also asked about the impact that these officers had on safety at their schools (see Table 4). An SRO is a law enforcement officer assigned to work at a particular school or schools as his/her "beat" while a School Security Officer is a school employee with school security responsibilities. The purpose of this question was primarily to assess respondents' understanding of who SROs and School Security Officers are and their impact on school safety.

Table 4: Perceived Presence and Impact of Full-time SROs and Security Officers at Schools

Type of Officer	% Responding that school has an officer	If school has an officer, perceived impact				
		% Very Positive Impact	% Fairly Positive Impact	% No Impact	% Negative Impact	% Missing
School Resource Officer (SRO)	73%	52%	25%	6%	1%	17%
School Security Officer	44%	47%	25%	8%	1%	19%

As shown above, the majority of respondents (73%) indicated that there is a full-time SRO at their schools, with 77% of these respondents rating the impact of the SROs on school safety as positive. However, 6% of respondents said they did not know if their schools had an SRO. Fewer respondents (44%) indicated that there was a full-time School Security Officer at their schools, but most of these respondents also reported that the officers had a positive impact on school safety.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the request of the Virginia Center for School Safety (VCSS), the DCJS Evaluation Unit completed an assessment to evaluate training needs in Virginia's public schools for safety-related topics. A written survey was anonymously completed by administrators, full-time teachers, and guidance counselors in public secondary, middle, and alternative schools in ten sample localities. The survey identified safety training that school staff would find most helpful to them, assessed staff awareness of school policies and personnel that affect school safety, identified methods of training most likely to be accessed by school personnel, and identified specific printed resource materials and other issues that school staff would like the VCSS to address.

Respondents returned 1,758 surveys. Most respondents were female teachers. Over one-half of the respondents had worked in Virginia's public school system for over ten years. To guide the VCSS in providing technical assistance and resources, the survey asked school staff to identify current safety-related policies. Most respondents reported that policies existed to cover access to schools, crisis management, lockdown/evacuation procedures, removing disruptive students, diffusing disruptive and assaultive students, and search and seizure. No more than 57% of these respondents rated existing safety-related policies as completely comprehensive. Almost half said that their schools did not have a policy regarding security equipment. One-third or more did not know if their schools had policies covering drug testing of students, the school safety audit, loss prevention/inventory control, and vandalism/graffiti control.

To guide the VCSS in its training responsibilities, the survey asked respondents to rate the helpfulness of safety-related training topics. Staff reported that training to improve their personal safety would be the most helpful general category of safety training. While respondents said that training in all specific safety topics would be at least somewhat helpful, they ranked the following individual training topics as high priorities:

- identifying students in need of special services or assistance,

- methods for diffusing disruptive and assaultive students,

- identifying students at-risk for violent behavior,

- identifying and avoiding at-risk situations,

- intervening with angry/abusive families,

- recognizing signs and symptoms of drug use,

- responding to medical emergencies,

- reducing truancy and dropout rates,

- reducing staff victimization,

- legal rights of juveniles, and

- recognizing and dealing with bullying.

Most staff reported that they would prefer to attend training on their school campuses rather than off-campus. Almost one-third also reported that they would use printed information and access the VCSS website for training. Respondents asked most frequently for printed resources on the legal rights and liabilities of teachers. While some respondents asked for clarification of the roles, responsibilities, and staffing needs of SROs, respondents generally rated the impact of SROs and School Security Officers as positive.

Based on the findings outlined in this report, the Evaluation Unit of the Department of Criminal Justice Services, Research Center suggests that the following recommendations be considered.

1. ***In addition to student safety, the VCSS should also consider providing training to address staff safety issues.***

   Staff reported that training in all safety-related topics would be helpful to them. However, they rated training to improve their personal safety as the most important general category of training. These topics could include intervening with abusive families, disruptive students, and potentially violent situations; as well as reducing staff victimization. In addition, respondents most frequently requested printed information on the rights and liabilities of teachers.

2. ***The VCSS should consider providing training to school staff on their school campuses. Additional training formats could include videos, printed resources, and the VCSS Internet website.***

   Based on the finding that almost two-thirds of respondents preferred that trainings take place at their schools, the VCSS should consider most effectively using resources by providing training on school campuses. On-site training opportunities may maximize participation due to convenience and lower travel costs. However, almost one-half of respondents reported that they would use videos, and almost one-third said they would use printed resources and the Internet for training. This finding suggests that continued publicity and improvement of the VCSS website could enhance utilization of the Center as a resource for school staff. Use of technological training methods, when feasible, might also reduce expenditures needed for on-site or regional training.

3. ***The VCSS should consider reviewing existing school policies, identifying "best practice" policies, and providing training on these safety policies to school personnel, particularly newly-hired staff.***

   Many survey respondents reported that a number of existing school policies did not completely address safety-related issues. In addition, many school staff, especially those employed less than two years, reported that they did not know if their schools had safety policies. Therefore, the VCSS should consider reviewing existing school policies to identify "best practice" policies and, subsequently, train school personnel, especially newly-hired staff, on these model policies. Written descriptions of model policies could also be provided at VCSS trainings.

4. ***The VCSS should consider developing and providing training and/or resources to improve communication among school staff regarding school safety.***

   Findings indicated that communication regarding school safety could be improved. Not all staff were aware of existing safety policies or the presence of security officers in the school, and some respondents cited improved communication and support between administration and staff as an area that the VCSS should address. The VCSS should consider identifying existing protocols for effective communication about school safety issues and providing training on these protocols. This could include developing and/or providing reference materials on safety-related policies and procedures, as well as guidance documents to prompt useful communication exchanges. These materials and documents should be made readily available to all staff, particularly to new staff as part of orientation training.

5. _The VCSS should consider developing and providing training to clarify the roles and responsibilities of School Resource Officers (SROs) and School Security Officers._

A majority of respondents reported that their schools did have SROs and that the SROs had positive impacts on school safety. In addition, those respondents who reported having a School Security Officer also rated the impact of these officers as positive. However, some respondents noted that they did not know if an SRO or a School Security Officer was assigned to their schools; some asked for clarification of the roles and responsibilities of these officers. Because SROs and School Security Officers can be resources for safety and security guidance in general as well as in crisis situations, it is important for school staff to be familiar with the roles and responsibilities of these officers.

SUMMARY

Respondents to a survey of school staff in Virginia's secondary, middle, and alternative public schools reported that training in the following safety-related topics would be the most helpful to them: identifying students in need of special services or assistance, methods for diffusing disruptive and assaultive students, identifying students at-risk for violent behavior, identifying and avoiding at-risk situations, and intervening with angry/abusive families. Respondents also varied in their awareness and assessment of safety-related school policies. Recommendations of this report focus on the safety-related issues and training formats requested by respondents and may be useful to guide future activities and resources of the Virginia Center for School Safety.

APPENDIX A

LEGISLATION ESTABLISHING THE VIRGINIA CENTER FOR SCHOOL SAFETY

§ 9.1-184. (Effective October 1, 2001) Virginia Center for School Safety created; duties.

(replaces § 9-173.21)

A.   From such funds as may be appropriated, the Virginia Center for School Safety (the "Center") is hereby established within the Department. The Center shall:

1. Provide training for Virginia public school personnel in school safety and the effective identification of students who may be at risk for violent behavior and in need of special services or assistance;

2. Serve as a resource and referral center for Virginia school divisions by conducting research, sponsoring workshops, and providing information regarding current school safety concerns, such as conflict management and peer mediation, school facility design and technology, current state and federal statutory and regulatory school safety requirements, and legal and constitutional issues regarding school safety and individual rights;

3. Maintain and disseminate information to local school divisions on effective school safety initiatives in Virginia and across the nation;

4. Collect, analyze, and disseminate various Virginia school safety data, including school safety audit information submitted to it pursuant to § 22.1-279.8, collected by the Department;

5. Encourage the development of partnerships between the public and private sectors to promote school safety in Virginia;

6. Provide technical assistance to Virginia school divisions in the development and implementation of initiatives promoting school safety; and

7. Develop a memorandum of understanding between the Commissioner of the Department of Criminal Justice Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to ensure collaboration and coordination of roles and responsibilities in areas of mutual concern, such as school safety audits and crime prevention.

B.   All agencies of the Commonwealth shall cooperate with the Center and, upon request, assist the Center in the performance of its duties and responsibilities.

(2000, c. 519, § 9-173.21; 2001, cc. 436, 440, 844.)

(This title is effective October 1, 2001.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NEWPORT NEWS CITY *Cont.*

James Chevious	Huntington Middle
Richard Coleman	Achievable Dream Middle
Tanya Davis	Jackson Academy
Jackie Diggs	Enterprise Academy/Middle
Michael Evans Sr.	Denbigh High
Benjamin Hogan	B.T. Washington Middle
Robert Johnson	Menchville High
Gene Jones	Warwick High
Asby Kilgore	Woodside High
Carol Lambiotte	J. M. Dozier Middle
Margaret Mahler	Homer L. Hines Middle
Robert Surry	Ethel M. Gildersleeve Middle
Timothy Sweeney Sr.	Heritage High

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

John Kidd	Rockingham County Superintendent
Frederic Babbitt	J. Frank Hillyard Middle
Delmer Botkin	Turner Ashby High
Joseph Dudash	Elkton Middle
Stephen Leaman	Broadway High
Lou Nagy	Dayton Learning Center
Robert Scott	Montevideo Middle
Mary Shifflett	Wilbur S. Pence Middle
Jim Slye	Spotswood High

SALEM CITY

N. Wayne Tripp	Salem Superintendent
Jerome Campbell	Andrew Lewis Middle
Caleb Littlejohn Hall Jr.	Salem High
Lewis Romano	Salem Alternative Education Program

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

George Ortman	Westmoreland County Superintendent
Harry Rippeon Jr.	Washington & Lee High
Chastine Williams	Montross Middle

WISE COUNTY

Michael Basham	Wise County Superintendent
Michael Baker	Powell Valley High
Larry Collier	Coeburn Middle
Robert Collins	Coeburn High
Larry Dingus	Wise County Vo -Tech Center
Gary Holloman	Appalachia High
James Hurt	Pound High
Haydee Robinson	L. F. Addington Middle
James Short	St. Paul High
Rufus Shull	J. J. Kelly High
Elizabeth Thomas	Wise Alternative Education Center
James Wardell	Powell Valley Middle

VIRGINIA CENTER FOR SCHOOL SAFETY TRAINING NEEDS SURVEY

VIRGINIA CENTER FOR SCHOOL SAFETY TRAINING NEEDS SURVEY

The Research Center at the Department of Criminal Justice Services is surveying teachers and school administrators to help the newly created Virginia Center for School Safety identify training needs that could further improve school safety. Your responses to this survey will provide guidance to the Center. Please seal your completed survey in a "DCJS" envelope and return the envelope to your principal, who will forward all sealed envelopes directly to the Research Center. *THANK YOU!*

A. What is your current position?

_____ Administrator
_____ Teacher – Regular Education
_____ Teacher – Special Education
_____ Other: specify _____

B. How long have you been employed in Virginia's public school system?

_____ Up to 2 years
_____ More than 2 years up to 5 years
_____ More than 5 years up to 10 years
_____ More than 10 years

C. What is your gender?   _____ Female   _____ Male

D. Many school policies and procedures impact school safety (e.g., a Crisis Management Plan, visitor control, etc.). First, please indicate if your school has a policy to address the topic listed, and *if yes*, rate how comprehensive the policy is.

Safety Policy Topic	Does your school have a policy on this topic?			If yes, how comprehensive is this policy? (i.e, how thoroughly does the policy address this safety topic) (Check one response)			
	Yes	No (skip to next topic)	Don't know (skip to next topic)	Completely	Somewhat	Not at all	Don't know
1. Crisis Management Plan							
2. School Safety Audit							
3. Access control (e.g., visitor control, closed campus, key control, etc.)							
4. Search and Seizure procedures							
5. Lockdown/evacuation policy							
6. Diffusing disruptive and assaultive students							
7. Vandalism/graffiti control							
8. Security equipment (surveillance cameras, metal detectors, etc.)							
9. Loss prevention/inventory control							
10. Teachers removing disruptive students from classes							
11. Re-integrating students back to class after removal for disruptive behavior							
12. Drug testing of students (legality, procedure, teacher's role, etc.)							
13. Computer/database security							

14. If there are any school safety issues not covered by existing policies/procedures, please describe the issues.

_____

PLEASE TURN PAGE OVER

E. One of the functions of the Center for School Safety is to offer training.
Please rate how helpful it would be for you to receive training on the following topics.

Training Topic	How helpful would it be to receive training on this topic? (Check one response)				
	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful
CRIME PREVENTION					
1. Law Related Education					
2. Identifying students who are at risk for violent behavior (incl. assessment of student-initiated threats)					
3. Methods for diffusing disruptive and assaultive students (incl. conflict management, anger control, stress management)					
4. Identifying weapons vs. weapon look-alikes and non-weapons					
5. Identifying drugs					
6. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of drug use					
7. Identifying gang characteristics and gang activities					
8. Improving safety by modifying school facility design (lighting, visibility, landscaping, etc.)					
9. Using technology to improve school safety and security (surveillance cameras, metal detectors, etc.)					
Specify any other crime prevention topic:					
STUDENT-FOCUSED TRAINING					
10. Recognizing and dealing with bullying					
11. Recognizing and dealing with sexual harassment					
12. Reducing truancy and student dropout rates					
13. Mentoring					
14. Identifying students who are in need of special services or assistance (students who may be victims of neglect/abuse, domestic violence, runaways, homeless, suicidal, etc.)					
15. Methods of peer mediation/conflict mediation					
Specify any other student-focused topic:					

Training Topic	How helpful would it be to receive training on this topic?				
	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful
REPORTING CRIME					
16. Criteria and procedures for identifying and reporting criminal behavior					
17. Using technology to improve school crime and violence data collection					
Specify any other crime reporting topic:					
LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES					
18. Use of force					
19. Current state and federal statutes (e.g., school safety regulations)					
20. Search & seizure law & procedures (arrest, interviewing, searches, liability issues, etc.)					
21. Legal rights of juveniles					
22. Juvenile court processes and procedures					
Specify any other legal and constitutional topic:					
PERSONAL SAFETY TRAINING FOR STAFF					
23. Intervening with angry/abusive parents/family members					
24. Reducing staff victimization (appropriate physical restraint techniques, classroom management to avoid volatile situations, etc.)					
25. Identifying and avoiding at-risk situations					
Specify any other personal safety topic:					
CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE ISSUES					
26. Responding to critical incidents (natural disasters, hazardous conditions, criminal incidents)					
27. Managing bomb threats					
28. Responding to medical emergencies/first aid/CPR					
29. Roles of community response team (EMT, fire department, law enforcement)					
30. Follow-up after critical incidents (e.g., de-briefing, counseling, etc.)					
Specify any other critical incident response topic:					

F. The Virginia Code authorizes the Center for School Safety to offer training on topics related to school safety. There are different ways that the Center might provide training. In the column to the right, please mark an "X" next to the three methods of training that you would be most likely to attend or access.

1.	Full or half-day trainings at in-school meetings
2.	Full or half-day trainings at locations away from your school
3.	Short presentations at staff meetings
4.	Multi-day/multi-topic training
5.	Videos
6.	Printed materials/manuals provided to your school
7.	Website
	Specify any other type of training method:

G: Does your school have a full-time:	Yes	No (skip to next line)	Don't know (skip to next line)	If yes, rate the impact that this officer has had on safety at your school. (Check one response)				
				Very positive	Fairly positive	Neither positive nor negative/no impact	Fairly negative	Very negative
1. School Resource Officer (SRO law enforcement officer)								
2. School Security Officer								

H. Please describe any specific printed resources that you would like to receive or see developed.

a. _____

b. _____

Overall, what other issues would you like to see the Center for School Safety address?

Please seal your completed survey in a DCJS envelope and return the sealed envelope to your principal. Your principal will forward all completed surveys to the Research Center. Thanks!

Call the Research Center at (804) 786-8449 with any questions or comments regarding this survey.
Call Donna Bowman at (804) 371-6506 with questions or comments regarding the VA Center for School Safety.

TABLE OF RESPONSES: PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF FUTURE TRAINING, BY INDIVIDUAL SAFETY-RELATED TOPIC

Data below were provided in response to this survey item:

"One of the functions of the Virginia Center for School Safety is to offer training. Please rate how helpful it would be for you to receive training on the following topics."

Topic	% Extremely Helpful (scale=1)	% Very Helpful (scale=2)	% Somewhat Helpful (scale=3)	% Not Very Helpful (scale=4)	% Not at all Helpful (scale=5)	Avg. Rating
CRIME PREVENTION	**30%**	**32%**	**27%**	**9%**	**3%**	**2.2**
Law-related education	29%	32%	32%	5%	2%	2.2
Identifying students at-risk for violent behavior	38%	39%	19%	3%	1%	1.9
Methods for diffusing disruptive & assaultive students	41%	37%	18%	3%	1%	1.9
Identifying weapons vs. weapon look-alikes & non-weapons	22%	29%	34%	13%	2%	2.4
Identifying drugs	28%	33%	27%	10%	2%	2.3
Recognizing signs & symptoms of drug use	37%	37%	20%	5%	1%	2.0
Identifying gang characteristics & gang activities	28%	32%	29%	9%	2%	2.3
Improving safety by modifying school facility design	20%	25%	31%	18%	6%	2.6
Using technology to improve school safety & security	24%	25%	29%	16%	6%	2.5
STUDENT-FOCUSED TRAINING	**33%**	**37%**	**24%**	**5%**	**2%**	**2.1**
Recognizing & dealing with bullying	33%	37%	24%	4%	2%	2.0
Recognizing & dealing with sexual harassment	29%	39%	26%	4%	1%	2.1
Reducing truancy & dropout rates	39%	33%	20%	6%	2%	2.0
Mentoring	28%	37%	27%	6%	1%	2.2
Identifying students in need of special services or assistance	40%	39%	17%	3%	1%	1.9
Methods of peer mediation/conflict mediation	26%	37%	28%	7%	2%	2.2
CRIME REPORTING	**20%**	**33%**	**33%**	**11%**	**3%**	**2.4**
Criteria & procedures for identifying & reporting criminal behavior	23%	39%	30%	6%	2%	2.3
Using technology to improve school crime & violence data collection	16%	28%	37%	16%	4%	2.6
LEGAL & CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES	**29%**	**36%**	**27%**	**6%**	**2%**	**2.2**
Use of force	29%	33%	30%	7%	2%	2.2
Current state & federal statutes regarding school safety regulations	30%	37%	26%	5%	1%	2.1
Search & seizure law and procedures	31%	36%	25%	6%	2%	2.1
Legal rights of juveniles	32%	39%	24%	4%	1%	2.0
Juvenile court processes & procedures	25%	34%	30%	9%	2%	2.3
PERSONAL SAFETY TRAINING FOR STAFF	**36%**	**39%**	**21%**	**4%**	**1%**	**2.0**
Intervening with angry/abusive families	37%	38%	21%	3%	1%	1.9
Reducing staff victimization	35%	37%	22%	4%	2%	2.0
Identifying & avoiding at-risk situations	35%	41%	20%	3%	1%	2.0
CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE	**24%**	**36%**	**30%**	**8%**	**2%**	**2.3**
Responding to critical incidents	24%	37%	30%	7%	2%	2.3
Managing bomb threats	24%	34%	31%	9%	2%	2.3
Responding to medical emergencies, first aid, CPR	35%	39%	22%	3%	1%	2.0
Roles of community response teams	17%	33%	36%	11%	2%	2.5
Follow-up after critical incidents	20%	36%	33%	9%	2%	2.4

NOTE: Percentages and average ratings are based on valid responses. Missing responses by topic ranged from 1% to 4% of total respondents.

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